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ABSTRACT

Sex role differences in self disclosure are more clearly defined than are gender differences. Students filled out a Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) as part of an introductory course requirement. Males and females who scored as either androgynous or stereotyped were selected for four targets: mother, father, male best friend, female best friend. Some results were that: (1) androgynous persons disclosed more, (2) no sex main effect was found, (3) androgynous males disclose more on intimate topics to their fathers, (4) androgynous persons disclose more on intimate topics to both best friend targets, (5) androgynous females disclose more on non-intimate topics to their fathers than do stereotypical females. The data suggest that self disclosure is a function of sex role and not of biological gender. The greater predictive value of androgyny over gender supports the major assumption that self disclosure is a function of sex role socialization. (BN)

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Self-Disclosure: A Function of Sex or Sex Role?

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Abstract

College students filled out a Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) as part of an introductory course requirement. Males and females who scored as Androgynous and Stereotyped were selected for 4 targets: mother, father, male best friend, female best friend. Analysis of variance (Sex x Androgyny x Target) yielded the following results: (1) Androgynous Ss disclosed more than stereotyped; (2) no sex main effect was found; (3) androgynous males disclose more on intimate topics to their fathers; (4) androgynous persons disclose more on intimate topics to both best friend targets; (5) androgynous females disclose more on non-intimate topics to their fathers while stereotyped females are uniquely low on such disclosures to father.

The data suggest that self-disclosure is a function of sex-role and not of biological gender.

Self-Disclosure: A Function of Sex or Sex Roles?

The literature in self-disclosure tends to indicate that females are higher disclosers than males (e.g., Jourard, 1971). However, the pattern is not as simple as that description implies. Instead it appears that certain aspects of self-disclosure are likely to differentiate between males and females while others may not. For example, Morgan (1976) and Lombardo and Berzonsky (in press) found the difference significant only for intimate topics: females disclosed more information than males on intimate topics while there were no differences on nonintimate topics. Similar findings have been reported with married couples (Katz, et al., 1963) and preadolescents (O'Neil, Fein, Velit & Frank, 1976). In the Katz et al. study, husbands were less likely to disclose on items revealing negative feelings such as anxieties and worries, while no differences were found for positive items. In the O'Neil et al. study, preadolescent females disclosed significantly more than males on intimate but not on nonintimate topics. The majority of evidence, therefore, appears to support Komarovsky's (1976) and Block's (1973) assumption that the socialization process discourages self-disclosure of intimate thoughts in males but encourages such disclosure in females. According to Komarovsky (1976) "the need to maintain a 'manly' facade, the fear of acknowledging 'feminine' traits - all generate in the male a constant vigilance against spontaneous expression of feelings" (p. 138). Jourard (1971) states, "the male role...will not allow man to acknowledge or to disclose the entire breadth and depth of his inner experience to himself and others. Man seems obliged, rather, to hide much of his real self" (p. 35). In short it appears that males are taught not to express themselves, especially on intimate topics or these which might reveal weaknesses.

In addition, self-disclosure generally is seen as a feminine sex-typed behavior (Chelune, 1976; Derlega & Chaiken, 1976).

One purpose of the present study is to examine the relationship between self-disclosure and psychological masculinity-femininity (androgyny) as measured by the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1974). It is hypothesized that sex-role is more closely related to one's level of self-disclosure than is gender. The primary hypothesis of the present study is that androgynous males are likely to demonstrate characteristically "feminine" patterns of self-disclosure.

The concepts of masculinity and femininity need not be viewed as bipolar ends of a single continuum (Bem, 1974, 1977). According to Bem (1976) in the fully effective and psychologically healthy person there is a balance of masculinity and femininity, each tempered by the other, thus producing a more balanced, less stereotyped personality which is called androgynous.

Studies of males have indicated that several specific feminine personality factors are related to self-disclosure. For example, Pedersen and Higbee (1969) found that high disclosing males were more reflective or introspective than low disclosing males. A recent study by Lombardo and Fantasia (1976) indicated that high-disclosing males had a greater capacity for intimate interpersonal contact and were more socially adjusted than low-disclosing males. The picture of the high disclosing male that emerges is one who has several traditionally "feminine" characteristics. The literature also suggests that self-disclosure

is perceived as a feminine-sex-typed trait and that males who disclose are either not liked or are perceived to be maladjusted (Chelune, 1976). We hypothesized that androcynous males would disclose more than their stereotyped counterparts. To the extent that females disclose more about intimate topics in particular, androgynous males should differ from stereotyped masculine males to a greater degree on intimate disclosure.

Studies of self-disclosure usually take into account the status of the "target" person to whom disclosures are made: father, mother, best female friend, best male friend. We expect that the father target should be a particularly distinctive one in comparing androgynous and stereotyped males. Pedersen and Higbee (1969) found that disclosures to fathers required considerably greater discrimination than those to mothers. That is, before disclosing to father males must judge the father to be warm, interested, close and friendly. These qualities are similar to those used by androgynous males to describe their fathers (Kelly & Worell, 1976). They described their fathers as playing an active role in their upbringing and as being warm and nurturant. This role is portrayed by items in which androgynous males recalled their fathers discussing feelings, issues and values with them. In particular, fathers of androgynous males express feelings about their sons, e.g., "He tells me how much he loves me." "He says I make him happy." These items suggest that fathers of androgynous males serve as models for disclosure of feelings. In addition, androgynous males described their fathers as "being easy to talk to," suggesting that self-disclosure is encouraged. Taken together these studies suggest that the father role is important in determining self-disclosure outcomes in sons.

There are other reasons for expecting that stereotyped males would come from homes in which their parental models are low disclosers. One point of evidence comes from findings that persons who are dominant in a relationship are less likely to disclose than their subordinates (Slobin, Miller, Porter, 1968). If we assume that stereotyped males come from homes where the mother and father maintain stereotyped sex-roles, it would follow that the fathers is the dominant figure in the home, and hence, low on disclosure to family members. In addition, given the role attributed to the father as "instrumental" in shaping traditional sex-typing in both sons and daughters (Johnson, 1963), it is anticipated that he would discourage self-disclosure in his sons while encouraging it in his daughters.

Predictions for mother as target are less clear. Johnson (1963) and Parson's (1955) suggest that there is little differentiation in mother's behavior according to the child's sex. Thus she might encourage self-disclosure from her son in a stereotyped family. Indeed her role in the traditional family is that of expressive-emotional discussant. Papanek (1969) found that fathers in low sex-role differentiated families were seen as "open in expressing affection," while results for mothers were less clear. To the extent, however, that mother does differentiate according to "appropriate" sex-role stereotyping, we would expect traditionally reared males to disclose less to her. Also to the extent that disclosure is a function of a general set we would expect self-disclosure from androgynous males.

Disclosure to best male and female friend should be different for androgynous and stereotyped males' with androgynous males disclosing more. If stereotyped males come from more stereotyped families we expect them to be unlikely to disclose to other males because: (a) they may assume that male friends do not like other males who disclose (Chelune, 1976) and (b) they may choose more stereotyped friends who themselves are low disclosers and who do discourage self-disclosure. We also expect stereotyped males to disclose less to female friends because: (a) they may assume females prefer a traditional "strong silent" male; (b) they would see women as inappropriate colleagues with whom to share their interests and feelings and (c) they may interpret self-disclosure to females as a weakness.

We expect androgynous females to disclose more to their fathers than do stereotyped females. This expectation is based on the presumption that androgynous females come from less stereotyped homes in which, (a) fathers are more receptive to self-disclosure (and model it) and (b) less stereotyped father-daughter relations prevail, i.e., they have more shared interests and activities. This should lead to greater self-disclosure to father on nonintimate topics since interests and activities are categorized as nonintimate.

METHOD

Subjects

Four groups of subjects were designated as follows on the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1976): androgynous males (N=11), androgynous females (N=14), stereotyped males (N=26), stereotyped females (N=32). The subjects were selected from a group of 112 volunteer students from classes in

Introductory Psychology and Theories of Personality and participated for extra credit. The remaining 29 students were not used in the present study because of n's under ten per cell. The excluded students were: 6 masculine females, 6 feminine males, 8 undifferentiated males, and 9 undifferentiated females. The subjects were designated according to the method described by Spence, Helmreich and Stapp (1975). In completing the Bem Sex Role Inventory, one indicates on a seven point scale how well each of 20 masculine and 20 feminine characteristics describes oneself. Each subject then has two scores, a mean masculinity and a mean femininity score. The median value for all subjects for each scale is then computed and subjects are designated according to whether their mean scores fall above or below the median. Androgynous subjects have mean masculinity and femininity scores above the median for each scale; stereotyped males are above the median on masculinity and below on femininity; stereotyped females are above on femininity and below the median on masculinity.

Procedure

Subjects were tested in groups of 10-15. Each student was given a packet containing the BSRI and a sixty question self-disclosure scale. Fifty of the sixty self-disclosure items were taken directly from the 60-item Jourard Self-Disclosure Questionnaire (Jourard, 1971). These fifty items were broken down into five topical categories consisting of 10 items each. The categories were: attitudes and opinions, tastes and interests, work, personality, and body. The remaining 10 items dealt

with sex, e.g., "whether or not I have sex problems and the nature of the problems if any; my views about what is acceptable sex morality for people to follow." The items in this latter category were taken from various self-disclosure scales found in Jourard (1971). Each subject was asked to indicate on a 5-point scale the extent to which they had talked about each item to four target persons; mother, father, best male friend and best female friend, (1=have disclosed nothing about this aspect of myself; 5=have disclosed fully on this topic.) Half of the students completed the BSRI first while half completed the self-disclosure scale first.

The six topical categories were designated intimate (personality, body, sex) or nonintimate (attitudes and opinions, tastes and interests, and work). Each subject had three self-disclosure scores for each target: intimate, nonintimate and total self-disclosure.

RESULTS

It was hypothesized that androgynous males would engage in more self-disclosure than masculine males across all targets.

Total disclosure scores were analyzed by a 2 (Sex) x 2 (Androgyny) x 4 (Target) unequal n analysis of variance. The analysis yielded a significant Androgyny main effect (F=5.31, df=1,179, $p < .05$) indicating that androgynous persons disclosed more than stereotyped persons. As expected, a significant Target main effect was found (F=29.89, df=3,237, $p < .01$) indicating that, in general, friends are disclosed to more than parents. The analysis also yielded a significant Sex x Target interaction

(F=5.61, df=3,237, $p < .01$) and a significant triple interaction (Sex x Androgyny x Target) (F=3.65, df=3, 237, $p < .025$). Specific Newman-Keuls tests were used to test for signficant comparisons within these interactions. Androgynous males disclosed more to mother ($p < .05$) than stereotyped males; the difference for female subjects disclosure to mother was not significant. Androgynous males disclosed more ($p < .05$) to father than stereotyped males; the difference in disclosure to father was not significant for females. Thus total disclosure to each parent was greater for androgynous males than stereotyped, with no differences for females. Total disclosure to each of male and female best friend is greater for androgynous males than stereotyped ($p < .05$) and greater for androgynous females than stereotyped ($p < .05$). No other main effects or interactions for Total Disclosure attained significance. The consistent differences between androgynous and stereotyped males, however, offer strong support for the first hypothesis.

Specific Targets

Analyses to specific targets were computed by 2 (Androgyny) x 2 (Intimate-nonintimate topics) x 2 (Sex) unequal n analyses of variance.

Mother

The analysis of variance to the target mother yielded a significant intimacy main effect (F=219.91, df=1,79, $p < .001$) and indicated that significantly more nonintimate information was disclosed to mothers. The only other effect to approach significance was Sex x Androgyny interaction (F=3.05, df=1,79, $p < .10$). An examination of this

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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interaction indicated that androgynous males disclosed more than stereotyped males to their mothers (t=1.96, df=35, $p < .05$, one-tail), while this difference for female subjects was not significant ($t < 1$). The remaining main effects and interactions were not significant.

Father

The results of self-disclosure to father are graphically presented in Figure 2.

The analysis of variance indicated that androgynous persons disclosed more to their fathers (F=13.33, df=1,79, $p < .001$), and that significantly more nonintimate than intimate disclosures are made to father (F=17.20, df=1,79, $p < .001$). The analysis also indicated that the Sex x Androgyny x Intimacy interaction was significant (F=7.39, df=1,79, $p < .01$). An analysis of this interaction supports the hypothesis that androgynous males would disclose more than stereotyped males to their fathers. Although Newman-Keuls tests indicated that androgynous males did not disclose more nonintimate information ($\bar{x}$=96.10), they did disclose significantly more ($p < .05$) intimate information ($\bar{x}$=96.27 versus 64.57). Examination of the means will show that androgynous males disclosed as much on intimate topics ($\bar{x}$=96.27) as stereotyped males disclosed on nonintimate topics ($\bar{x}$=96.11). The data clearly indicate that both androgynous and stereotyped males equally discussed nonintimate topics with their fathers while androgynous males shared more intimate disclosures with fathers.

We also hypothesized that androgynous females would disclose more to father on nonintimate topics. The significant triple interaction and

subsequent Newman-Keuls tests support this hypothesis. The difference is significant for nonintimate disclosure ($p < .05$) while it is not significant for intimate disclosures.

Best Male Friend

We hypothesized that masculine males would disclose less to male friends, particularly on intimate topics. A significant Androgyny x Intimacy interaction ($F=5.84$, $df=1,79$, $p < .025$) supports this assumption for male and female androgynous persons. Newman-Keuls tests indicated that this interaction resulted from a nonsignificant difference in disclosure on nonintimate topics and a significant difference on intimate topics with androgynous persons disclosing more. Neither the Sex of Subject main effect nor Sex x Androgyny x Intimacy interaction was significant. A significant Androgyny main effect was found ($F=6.92$, $df=1,79$, $p < .025$) indicating that androgynous subjects disclosed more than stereotyped subjects. A significant Intimacy main effect ($F=29.90$, $df=1,79$, $p < .001$) indicates more nonintimate than intimate disclosures to the best male friend.

Insert Figure 4 about here

Best Female Friend

The analysis of disclosure scores to best female friend had several significant main and interaction effects. The Sex of Subject main effect was significant ($F=11.69$, $df=1,79$, $p < .001$) and indicates that females disclosed more to female friends than did males. The Androgyny main effect

was also significant (F=4.80, df=1,79, $p < .05$): androgynous persons disclosed more than stereotyped persons. The Sex x Androgyny interaction was not significant ($F < 1$). A significant Intimacy main effect (F=40.88, df=1,79, $p < .001$) indicates more nonintimate than intimate information was disclosed. The Sex x Intimacy, and Androgyny x Intimacy interactions also reached significance (F=7.15, df=1,79, $p < .01$) and (F=8.04, df=1,79, $p < .01$, respectively). The Sex x Androgyny x Intimacy interaction was not significant ($F < 1$).

An analysis of the Sex x Intimacy interaction, by Newman-Keuls tests, indicates that males and females did not differ in level of nonintimate self-disclosure. However, on intimate topics, females disclosed significantly more ($p < .05$). The Androgyny x Intimacy interaction indicated no difference in nonintimate disclosures while the difference for intimate disclosures was significant ($p < .01$) with androgynous persons disclosing more than stereotyped persons.

The evidence from best friend targets suggests that androgynous individuals of either sex disclose more about intimate items than do stereotyped. The evidence also shows cross-sex target disclosures to be more frequent among androgynous Ss. Androgynous females disclose more than stereotyped or androgynous males to male best friends while stereotyped females are least likely to do so. In disclosure to best female friend, androgynous females continue to rank first while androgynous males are barely outranked by stereotyped females. Masculine males fall last in cross-sex peer disclosure. Thus for both sexes, stereotyped individuals rank last in cross sex-sex disclosure. (See Figure 3 and 4).

DISCUSSION

The data of the present study indicate that sex-role differences in self-disclosure are more clearly defined than are gender differences. The greater predictive value of androgyny over gender supports the major assumption of the present study: that self-disclosure is a function of sex role socialization. Androgynous males, possessing both masculine and feminine characteristics, incorporate the ability to be open and self-aware.

The results also support Kelly and Worrell's (1976) findings regarding the role of parents, particularly fathers of males, in the development of androgynous children. We found that intimate self-disclosure to father (moreso than nonintimate) differentiated between androgynous and stereotyped males. Thus while stereotyped males may be willing to discuss some things with their fathers the data of the present study indicate that intimate feelings are excluded from these discussions.

From the evidence available here we cannot tell what specific role the father plays in eliciting self-disclosure. Possibilities include: (a) that the father encourages disclosures from the son, (b) more initiation by father with son reciprocating, and, (c) imitation of the father as a model of self-disclosure. If one assumes that the fathers of androgynous males are androgynous with respect to self-disclosure, any of the above are plausible.

For females the reverse was predicted in relation to father: we expected androgynous females to differ from stereotyped females primarily on nonintimate disclosures to father. That this is so suggests that androgynous females may be encouraged to spend time with their fathers

engaged in traditional "father-son" discussions about facts rather than feelings. Such nonintimate disclosure to father is consistent with the literature on successful career women (Hennig & Jardim, 1977), an example of non-traditional feminine development. Indeed, the extreme lack of nonintimate disclosure between stereotyped females and their fathers is underlined by the fact that this is the only subject - target combination characterized by a higher level of intimate than nonintimate disclosure. In contrast androgynous females' self-disclosure to father is not different from that of male subjects. It is interesting to compare this to the Kelly and Worrell (1976) findings that androgynous females saw their fathers as encouraging cognitive independence and intellectual competence. Perhaps the specific forms of nonintimate disclosure between father and androgynous daughters emphasize discussion and debate of impersonal topics. Further study is indicated on this topic.

The suggested importance of fathers in the data recalls Parson's (1955) and Johnson's (1963) theories of sex role learning which describe fathers as the important figure in delineating sex role appropriate behavior while mothers treat all children equally.

Regarding the mother's role we find androgynous males disclosing more than stereotyped males and equal to female subjects. Possibly this reflects a lesser degree of sex-role dichotomy in the androgynous males' families, making mother-son interaction more spontaneous and frequent. It is also possible that high disclosing individuals attract each other and that their children, therefore, have two consistent self-disclosing models.

As an extension of our assumptions regarding differential parental roles we expected generalization to same and opposite sex peers. If stereotyped subjects expect males to discourage self-disclosure they might disclose less to best male friend. This pattern of self-disclosure is confirmed for both males and females. In keeping with the expectation that traditional sex roles especially discourage intimate disclosures we find that it is principally on intimate topics that this difference holds. This parallel's the findings for disclosure to male parent. Explanations for this include (a) the stereotyped subject's expectations that males will discourage self-disclosure and (b) the self selection of friends with like values who actually do differentially discourage self-disclosure for stereotyped vs. androgynous persons. Regarding the greater disclosure of androgynous females to male friends we may also consider the possibility that they see less traditional restrictions on the nature of their relationships with males, thus permitting the intimate sharing of ideas with opposite sex friends.

For best female friend we expected results to follow the mother target pattern. Androgynous males fulfill this expectation by disclosing more to best female friend, as they did to mother.

In general it appears that stereotyped subjects are less likely to engage in cross-sex peer disclosure. The lowest disclosure to best female friend is by stereotyped males, while the lowest disclosure level to best male friend comes from stereotyped females. This reticence to engage in cross-sex disclosure fits our assumption that the stereotyped subject's family emphasizes the distinctiveness of sex roles and, therefore, the impropriety of cross-sex disclosures.

Finally, regarding peers, it should be pointed out that the results are consistent with earlier studies: friends are more frequently targets of disclosure than are parents and same sex friends moreso than opposite sex.

In sum the present study supports the validity of the Bem Sex Role Inventory. The data adds to the literature evidence for one more sex typed behavior which distinguishes between androgynous and masculine stereotyped males, showing androgynous males to be similar to females in self-disclosure.

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